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## The reference to L1 and L2 in SFL: proposals based on the Aprescrllov learner corpus

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### Abstract

In this article we introduce the architecture and use of the learner corpus Aprescrllov, and try to show its utility in the didactics of Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) in multilingual Belgium from the objectives and methodology of a PhD about the use of the change-of-state verbs. Therefore we describe the theoretical framework, our corpus Aprescrllov and the general methodology of the PhD.

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### 1. Introduction

After several years of experience as SFL (Spanish Foreign Language) teachers in Flanders, we decided to compile a corpus in order to corroborate, contrast or rectify an intuition based on daily work in the classroom: our students often make errors when using certain Spanish lexico-grammatical components that do not have exact counterparts in French or Dutch (such as *ser* and *estar* —both mean “to be”— or the change-of-state verbs), although the degree of interference between both languages has not been proven yet.

Therefore, our main reason to create the corpus was to determine more objectively the parameters that induce learners of Spanish to make errors about these two topics as well as the interferences between the L1 and the L2.

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In this article we first present our theoretical framework (2) and the Aprescritiv (Aprender a Escribir en Lovaina, “Learning to write in Leuven”) corpus (3), followed by a state of the art (4) and the objectives and methodology (5) of our study on the change-of-state verbs.

## 2. General theoretical framework

In our study two theoretical frameworks come together:

1. Error Analysis (“EA”, see a.o. Fernández, 2007; Santos Gargallo, 2008);
2. Interlanguage studies (“IL”, see a.o. Suby & Asención-Delaney, 2009; Torrecilla, 2011).

Although they both originated in the 1960s-1970s and their focus on SFL was lost at the end of the last century, the field of “English second/foreign language” (ESL/EFL) has kept on incorporating studies in EA and IL. However, other investigation fields are recovering them too thanks to the impulse of current fruitful studies about the compilation, description and analysis of learner corpora (e.g. Díaz-Negrillo & Fernández Domínguez, 2006). A proof of this renewed interest was found at several recent congresses on the role of the L1 and the L2 in Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) teaching.

Both methods will be presented in detail in the two following sections (2.1 and 2.2). In 2.3 we will discuss the role of the L1 in the foreign language classroom.

### 2.1 Error Analysis (EA)

EA became relevant thanks to the work of Corder (Corder, 1981). It is, essentially, a scientific procedure whose objective is to determine the nature, the cause and the consequences of the errors made by non-native language learners when learning/acquiring a foreign language.

In the case of SFL, Isabel Santos Gargallo is one of the most prominent voices. In Santos Gargallo (2008) she emphasized the contribution of EA to the knowledge of the learning process of Spanish (L2/FL) and to the underlying psycholinguistic processes.

### 2.2 Interlanguage (IL)

Additionally, the final objective of EA is to draw conclusions from the identification, description and explanation of the errors, with the aim of proposing didactic procedures which will help to avoid those errors in the interlanguage of non-native speakers. Therefore, EA is closely related to Interlanguage (IL), a framework created by Selinker in 1972, whose aim is to hypothesize the existence of a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner’s attempted production of a Target Language (TL) norm. This linguistic system is called interlanguage.

Also related to the IL is the dilemma of the reference to L1 and L2 in the foreign language classroom (Galindo Merino, 2011) and its impact on the learning process. This topic forms a traditional discussion, not only in SFL, but in foreign language teaching as a whole, in which several extreme positions are still defended without providing the added value of any of them.

### 2.3 Reference to L1 and L2 in the foreign language classroom

Nussbaum (1991) differentiates between three groups of foreign language teachers: a first group where teachers never use the mother tongue, a second group who defends the use of the mother tongue only for elucidations, metalinguistic explanations and translation of concepts and difficult words and a third group who only uses the mother tongue in “crisis” situations, when they observe that communication blocks. Despite the absence of a detailed reasoning in favor of the exclusion of L1 in the classroom, this position is commonly used in Spanish for adult education (the most common form of Spanish language education in Flanders). Nevertheless, several studies conclude that the use of only the FL has some important disadvantages in the learning process: Suby & Asención-Delaney (2009) refer to various investigations made by Chaudron and Thompson, which show that the simplified

language used by the teacher gives students fewer chances to evaluate their input. Chaudron and Thompson also show that beginner students of Spanish use the FL less creatively and don't improve their listening skills significantly, despite receiving much input of the FL from the teacher. On the other hand, the use of L1 limited to metalanguage, instructions and difficulties of crisis moments degrades L1 to the status of a merely negative instrument, not making the most of its possibilities to reinforce the learning process in a positive way (Buyse & González, 2013). One of those possibilities is found in the field of intercomprehension, which is defined as the capacity of understanding a foreign language without having learnt it on the basis of another language (Meissner et al., 2004). In intercomprehension and plurilingualism didactics several studies (e.g. Vez 2007, Carullo et al. 2010) are based on the idea that common structures are more beneficial than detrimental when learning a second or third language from the same family. That is the reason why the EU is currently financing several projects aiming to design strategies, materials and activities promoting intercomprehension and plurilingualism in language learning (e.g. BabelWeb, see [www.babel-web.eu](http://www.babel-web.eu)).

Our research follows the same line of investigation, but is innovative in two aspects: (1) while the above mentioned projects focus on skills (reading and writing texts) and the macro-level of the language (such as discourse markers), we propose to develop strategies and materials for the micro-level of the language, namely the border between lexicon and grammar, like the use of *ser* and *estar* and the change-of-state verbs in Spanish; (2) furthermore, our project is a pioneer in the corpus study of the influence of more than one language on foreign language acquisition. Our goal is to determine the possible interferences between one language and another more objectively (see section 5).

For better argumentation, we will describe the current learner corpus in the following section.

### 3. The learner corpus Aprescrilov

The introduction of corpus linguistics into SFL teaching makes it possible for the results of EA and IL studies not to be merely descriptive and structuralist, but based on solid data, in this case of a learner corpus.

The architecture of our corpus Aprescrilov and its analysis are based on the theoretical frameworks proposed by a.o. Díaz-Negrillo & Fernández Domínguez (2006) and Granger (1996). The utility of these frameworks has been proven, among others, in Gilquin, Granger and Paquot (2007), but is normally limited to the interference between one language and another (e.g. Fernández, 2007; Buyse et al., 2009). In Buyse & González (2013) we describe an example of the first type of study (namely, a study of the use of *ser* and *estar* by Dutch-speaking Flemish students). In the current article we present the study on the change-of-state verbs, based on a second corpus with texts by Flemish, Dutch and Walloons students.

Our first corpus, Aprescrilov I, is composed of more than 2700 texts written in the academic years 2004-2005 and 2009-2010 by students of Spanish Linguistics and Literature at the Faculty of Arts of the KU Leuven and of Applied Linguistics at the Lessius Hogeschool (now "KU Leuven @ Antwerp"). The compositions have been digitally marked with the same customized version of the Markin program (see a.o. Buyse & González, 2013), whose "button set" allows systematic marking of problems or 'errors' in the texts. The online corpus includes a qualitative and quantitative description of each component (number of compositions, number of words per text) and a search engine which allows us to search examples and their contexts using criteria such as type of problem, course, academic year or institution.

The operating extension of the corpus leads to the corpus Aprescrilov II, composed of texts of Dutch-speaking students of the same institutions, Spanish texts from Dutch students of the Radboud Universiteit (Nijmegen, the Netherlands) and French-speaking Walloon students of the UCL (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium) written in the same period and on comparable subjects. These texts are gathered in an online corpus with the same interface as Aprescrilov I.

#### 4. State of the art on change-of-state verbs from a contrastive Spanish-Dutch perspective

In Morimoto & Pavón Lucero (2007), the change-of-state verbs are considered a subgroup of pseudo-copula verbs, which includes *hacerse*, *volverse*, *quedarse*, *ponerse*, *llegar a ser*, *convertirse* (*en*) and other less frequent items such as *tornarse* (*en*), *meterse a* and *trocarse*.

The space dedicated to this issue in Spanish grammars is usually limited (see Fernández Pereda, Buyse & Vervecken, 2014).

In Dutch, the change-of-state verbs are usually expressed by only one verb, i.e. *worden*, which does not have a direct, specific counterpart in Spanish. As a consequence, its translation is not easy for Flemish learners of SFL. It seems that they try to solve this problem by using a literal and non-existing translation from its French counterpart (*\*devenir*) or by risking to use one of the Spanish counterparts at random.

#### 5. Objectives and methodology of our study on change-of-state verbs

The objectives of our own study are as follows:

- 1) we want to check which errors are more frequent in this field of change-of-state verbs;
- 2) we intend to examine the learner corpus Aprescrilov II to check in a more objective way the influence of French (the L1 of Walloon students, the L2 of Flemish students and the L3-4-5 of Dutch students) and Dutch (the L1 of Flemish and Dutch students, the L2-3-4-5 of Walloon students) on the Spanish of these students: more specifically, what errors made by students of Spanish are more frequent among Dutch and Flemish students compared to French-speaking students, so that they become more objective candidates to possible interferences with Dutch?;
- 3) by analyzing the errors made by the learners in this corpus and by comparing them to the target-like occurrences of the change-of-state verbs, we expect to find out which factors are decisive in helping to choose the most suitable verb;
- 4) on the basis of the data extracted from the analysis of the extended learner corpus, we will formulate a didactic proposal which will include a contrastive perspective;
- 5) through a pre- and post- test we intend to check the impact of such contrastive presentation on the quality of the output in the learning process of the change-of-state verbs by SFL learners.

#### 6. Conclusions

As mentioned above, we intend to provide a new contribution to international research about EA, IL and Learner Corpus Analysis. The link between these three topics has only been developed during the last years, but has been limited to the influence of one language (usually the L1) on the target language. As far as we know, this project is a pioneer in studying the influence of more than one language in second language acquisition through corpus analysis. Moreover, and unlike other current projects, we want to develop strategies and materials accurate to the micro-level of a language, i.e. the border between vocabulary and grammar.

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